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White Christopher

Annie Trumbull Slosson
AUTHOR OF "FISHIN' JIMMY"

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The gift of

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White Christopher

THE SNOW CROSS ON MT. LAFAYETTE

White Christopher

BY

Annie Trumbull Slosson

Author of "Fishin' Jimmy"

New York

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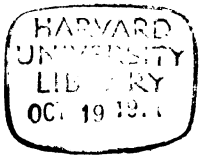

To Polly

White Christopher

THE first time I saw Christopher Bowles—but his name wasn't Christopher then—he was only two or three weeks old. Seemed to me at the time, and it does now as I recollect back, that he looked more like a little white rabbit than anything else. His hair, and there was a good deal of it, was most as white as snow and his eyelashes and eyebrows the same, and his eyes were sort of pink, or you might say, brownish with pink showing through, exactly like that rabbit's eyes over at the Noyes's there, across the way. I suppose he was what they call an albino, though I never saw any other, but folks said he was that

kind. I lived quite a piece away from the Bowles family, Cyrus Bowles, I mean. They were up on the Wallace Hill road then and I was just here where I am now on the way to Lisbon.

Charlotte Bowles and I went to school together when she was Charlotte Streeter and we grew up great friends, and I'd known Cyrus's folks, too, all my life. They were all Franconia people, both sides, born and raised here. Charlotte didn't know exactly whether to be pleased with her little white baby's looks or not, but she loved him hard, from the minute he came. I didn't know what to say about him, either. He wasn't like any baby I'd ever seen before and he didn't favor any of his relations. He wasn't what you'd call pretty, but he was cunning, so little and white, with those pinky-brown eyes.

The child lived and grew and did well enough as far as his health went. But it wasn't many weeks before we all saw that there was something wrong or at any rate out of the common about the boy. The pinky eyes didn't see very well and after a spell we found that though he appeared to hear well enough he couldn't talk, and worse than that, there was something wrong about the mind. We never called him, even to ourselves, an idiot. That seems such a dreadful word and he was his mother's only child and she loved him more than tongue can tell. But I suppose perhaps he was a kind of one; strangers called him so, I know.

Cyrus and Charlotte didn't name the child at first; they kept putting it off, putting it off, not exactly knowing what he was going to turn out, hoping and

hoping he'd improve and be like other children. They called him "Baby" for a long time, and when he got too big for that he was "the little boy," and after that just "the boy," and he went on being that, even to the folks all around there. So he never had any real name, first name, of his own till he was more than twelve year old.

I told you he was kind of cunning looking when he was a baby, though never real pretty. But as he got older and bigger he wasn't nice looking at all. He was dreadfully thin and always so pale, not a bit of color in his face anywheres. His hair was as white as an old man's and so were his eyebrows and eyelashes. His eyes didn't see much; he kept them half shut up, and what you could see of them had such a dead, dull sort of look. Fact

is, there wasn't much life of any kind in the poor boy; he was dead and dull inside and out.

He never went out much, never played or ran about like other boys. He used to sit at the back door, generally on the steps, still and quiet, hour after hour, day after day. Most times he didn't seem to be looking at anything; his eyes were generally half shut up and dead looking, and he had such a miserable, unhappy look on his face. Folks were sorry for him and never unkind to him, but nobody loved him much nor wanted him around, except his father and mother—his mother most, of course. Cyrus was fond of him, naturally, for he was his own child, his first one and his last, for they never had another. But he was disappointed and a bit ashamed and didn't always like to be

reminded of that by seeing the boy around. Men are that way, you know, most of them, a little more than women, maybe. But his mother, she was wrapped up in the boy; sometimes I thought she set more by him than if he'd been a rugged, pretty child to be showed off and proud of, she made so much of him, and kept him always clean and nicely dressed. She used to have such a loving, mothery look on her face when she looked at him, and when she didn't know anyone saw her, she'd put her two arms round him and draw him up to her close and tight and often kiss his white, pinched little face. He didn't take much to being coddled, though, and hardly ever showed any signs of loving his mother or anybody else. But, by spells, there'd come a kind of half troubled, considering, longing look

in his pinky-brown eyes when Charlotte held him tight, most as if there was some real love down in his dead little heart, only he didn't know how to bring it out. But Charlotte was the only one that appeared to notice that much and understand it. He never cared for creatures and they seemed to know it. Dogs and cats, the horses and cows, even the cosset lambs just kept away from him, knowing fast enough, as animals will, you know, that he didn't want them or feel any interest in them.

Cyrus and Charlotte were good, religious folks, both professors from the time they were boy and girl and joined the church the same Sunday. So they tried their best to bring the boy up in the fear of the Lord. But what could they do? You couldn't seem to get an idea of any

kind into that poor, stupid head. He knew when he was hungry or thirsty or wanted anything and had his own way of letting his folks know. But that was all. As for learning him about right and wrong, minding, showing respect to his father and mother, being thankful or kind or merciful, why it appeared as if you couldn't do it. And so, of course, to put anything into his mind about God and heaven, rewarding and punishing, forgiving and all, was just impossible; that couldn't be done at all.

But they tried, especially Charlotte. She'd tell him the story in the gospels, over and over and over. I've heard her myself and it made me cry; 'twould have made you or anybody. It's a story, anyway, that you never quite get used to, however many times you hear it. And to listen to

that poor woman telling it from the very beginning down to the mournful, sorrowful end; telling it in easy little words, so plain and simple, her voice shaky and her eyes wet, why, 'twas the most moving thing. But the boy sat there, not appearing to hear one word or take a mite of notice, his eyes just as dead and dull as ever, his face as cross and stupid looking. They had a big Bible with large print and lots of little pictures of Scripture scenes; Noah and the ark, Cain killing Abel, Daniel and the lions and all that. And in the New Testament there was the manger with the baby, the boy in the temple, and then all those last dreadful events, pictured out to most break your heart. And Charlotte would hold that Bible in her lap for hours, trying to call the boy's attention to it, pointing to the

pictures and telling him about them, most of all about the New Testament ones and that mournful thing that happened so long ago but means so much to all of us now. But the boy never took any notice of the pictures any more than if they weren't there, didn't even appear to see them at all. 'Twas sort of dreadful to watch his stupid face and dead, blind looking eyes and at the same time see his mother's features all shining with that story, her voice shaky and her eyes wet as she told the same thing over and over and over.

I don't know as I've given you much idea of the Bowles boy, after all, as he was right along from a baby up to twelve years old, when the change you asked me about took place. But it's the best I can do. A poor, half-witted boy, that might as well be dead as living as far as being a

comfort or help to anybody or having any pleasure in life himself; not really bad, or cruel, but surely not good or loving. Not that, anyway, except for those little quick spells which seemed to come over him once in a while and light him up, you might say, as if there was something bright and warm inside if you could only keep it burning. But it went out so quick, and only a few people ever saw it at all, or made anything of it, at any rate. But his mother always caught at that or any other sign of the soul she was certain sure was there if she could get at it or wake it up. She has told me time and time again about little things nobody but a mother would take notice of that showed, she thought, her poor boy understood and felt and hoped and wished and loved, most like other folks' boys, only all in-

side, not out. Poor Charlotte, she had to own that it was most generally in his sleep, the child showed these signs. She'd go to him nights to see if he was covered up or something and she'd see, so she said, such a beautiful, live, understanding look on his features as he lay there asleep, as though, even if 'twas only when he was dreaming, he knew all about things and was perfectly satisfied. "It most seems," says she, telling me about it once, "as if my boy was more wide awake when he's asleep than when he wakes up; though that sounds like a riddle."

I saw him that way once myself, but never but once. Charlotte took me into his room one evening when I was over there, and I must say I was all upset for a minute to see the boy. He had a real interested, enjoying but still look, most as

if he was seeing or listening to something beautiful. And Charlotte, as I said before, caught at every single little thing like that, as mothers do and always have from Scripture days, and "kept all these sayings"—or doings—"in her heart."

Now as to what came afterwards I can't explain it and don't pretend I can. It's been talked about and thought about and written about by wiser folks than me, for it made a good deal of talk in those days—many years ago, it is now. There've been different ways of accounting for it all, but I don't know as any one of them is exactly satisfying to me. I just settle down again, after reading or listening to those ideas and reasonings, to my old conclusion, what you heard me say to-day; it happened anyway and somebody made it happen. That's enough for me. How

'twas made to happen, what means were taken to bring it all about, I don't know and won't try to guess. But what anybody in this world could see of the whole thing I saw. For as I told you before, I was a great friend of the family and I knew that boy from the time he was a little baby to the very end. And I'll tell you all I know.

'Twas one day in the fall—October, I think—when the boy was in his twelfth year, that I got word from Charlotte Bowles that she wanted to see me and could I come over. I went right up the same afternoon for I felt sure she really needed me, as she wasn't one to trouble her neighbors for every little thing. The minute I saw her face I knew something pretty serious had happened. "What is it, Charlotte?" I says, and she went on, quick and ex-

cited, to tell me that she really believed the little boy was "beginning to take notice." Just think; he was most twelve and she talked as if it was a baby two months old. Seems that Cyrus had taken the boy out that day in the wagon. He had an errand at the store and then went on to 'Lias Bishop's, just over the little bridge that crosses Gale river before it joins Pond brook. Just as they drew up there, Cyrus looked up at the mountains, only happened to, and he saw the Snow Cross, as they call it, on Lafayette. You don't often see it at that time of year. But there'd been an early fall of snow and a warm spell afterwards, and all the snow but what was left in that hollow and against the side of that cliff—that's what makes the cross, you know, the snow lying in those two places that cross each

other—had melted. And there lay the cross, plainer, Cyrus said, than he'd ever seen it before, the sun shining on it so 'twas just dazzling, blinding white.

He always said afterwards that he couldn't recollect whether he spoke out loud or touched the boy or did anything like that to call his attention to the sight. Anyway, all of a sudden he saw that the boy was looking at it, or he seemed to be. His nearsighted, pinky eyes were blinking, but a little wider open than common, and they weren't quite so dull looking, somehow, and—Cyrus said he couldn't exactly put it into words, but there was a kind of waking-up look about him, as if, as his mother'd said, he was "beginning to take notice." Cyrus didn't speak to him or touch him. He just waited to see what the boy would do. He didn't

do anything at first but blink his eyes and look and look at that shining thing way up there on the side of old Lafayette. He was so still and kept his eyes fixed there so long that, after a spell, Cyrus was kind of frightened, so instead of stopping in at 'Lias's, as he'd been going to, he turned the horse around and drove home. And as they started the boy turned his head round and kept his eyes on that cross on the mountain till it was out of sight.

That don't seem a very wonderful thing to you, maybe, but it did to Cyrus and to the rest of us, too. For the boy hadn't ever, in all those eleven years, as far as we knew, turned his head to look at anything or anybody, before. Still I didn't make as much of it as Charlotte did. I asked her how the boy'd gone on since he came

home, if he'd appeared any ways different or anything. She said he hadn't as she could see. "Where is he now?" I asked her. She said he was in his old place at the back door. I thought I'd like to look at him and see if I noticed any change in him, so we went through the kitchen and into the back entry. The door was open and the boy was sitting outside on the top step. He looked just the same as common, as far as I could see, only maybe sitting up a mite straighter, more as if he was looking at something he really saw, but his eyes were half shut up still and blinky. I could see them, for I went right up side of him, without his knowing, and I thought they had a more seeing, waked-up look in them; that was all. But while we were standing there, his mother and me—I'll never forget it to my

dying hour, because of what came afterwards—he moved his arms that were hanging down sort of limp as they commonly did, and then began to lift them. Slow and slow they went up—he wasn't used to moving his limbs much—till in a minute or so they were standing out from his shoulders and there they stayed.

'Twas just singular to see it, he never having used his arms any to speak of before, though I didn't see any particular meaning to what he was doing, and his mother didn't, either. But she was worked up and nervy, seeing the boy do this thing, so different from anything he'd ever done before, and she ran up to him and put her hand on his arm. I didn't think he'd pay much attention to that, and Charlotte never looked for it, either, but as soon as she touched him the boy turned

his head and just gave her a look, oh, such a look! I shouldn't have called it a smile, exactly, but his mother did. "He's smiling at me," she says, quick and earnest but softly, not to start him. "Oh, see him smiling at me just like other boys!" He was real still, keeping his two arms stretched out stiff and straight, all the time looking up at his mother with what she called a smile. It seemed so different from common that I think Charlotte was a mite scared and she says to me, "Oh, go and call his father." I ran out to the field where Cyrus was at work and called him. The boy had put down his arms when we got back, but as his father came up in front of him he seemed to see him; anyway he turned his face up towards him and that sort of lighting up look came over it and again he stretched out his

arms. Cyrus was pleased and interested, but he took it more as a man does and wasn't so excited as Charlotte was. I went over home after that, but I know—his mother told me—that the boy stretched his arms out two or three times after that before night and after he'd gone to bed they found him lying that way, fast asleep, but with that pleasant, friendly look his mother called smiling staying all the time on his features.

I don't think she had any notion that first day or maybe for two or three days after of what he meant by that movement of his two arms. 'Twas a few days after that Cyrus said he meant to take the boy to ride again, it had done him so much good. He took him and they went up Notch way as they did before. When they came in sight of the mountains and Lafayette, Cyrus

looked up to see if there was any snow left. But the warm spell had kept on and there was only a few little patches of white there so that you couldn't make out any cross at all. But Cyrus saw that the boy was looking up where it had been, just as he did that other time. His eyes opened a little wider, that pleasant look lighted up his face and he stretched out his two arms; I think maybe a little notion of what the boy meant came into Cyrus's head that minute. But it was Charlotte put it into words first when her husband was telling her about it after he got back. "He's trying to make the Snow Cross," she says, almost crying, "he's copying that cross on Lafayette."

And he was; we all came to see it pretty soon, though I can't hardly tell just how we knew it. He kept on making that

motion after that, by spells, and often when he did it he'd look up at Lafayette or where it ought to be, till at last we were all sure what he was copying or trying to copy. I find now, as I try to recollect back and tell it all to you, that I can't follow things along just in the very order they happened after this. It's a good way back, you know, and of course I never kept any written account of it. But I am sure of one thing. It was the very day after his father took the boy out the second time in sight of Lafayette that he asked his mother for white clothes. He couldn't ask her in words, you know, but he made her understand somehow—it's easy to make mothers understand—that he wanted his clothes all white. She told me he pointed to her white apron and to the white table-cloth and to some white things bleaching

out on the grass in the sunshine and then stroked his own clothes and stretched out his arms and looked at his mother real earnest and wishful. And she says, "I know. He wants to be dressed up white, to look more like that cross on the mountain." That was the beginning of his always wearing white clothes. At first Charlotte put them on him, meaning just to satisfy him for the time, and never thinking he'd want to wear them always. But it made him so pleased and he begged in his own queer, still way not to have any other kind put on him, that she gave in. And all the rest of his days he was dressed in white clothes, coarse, plain things to be sure, but clean and white as snow, most. He kept them that way. He'd never had any notion before about taking care of himself and what he had on. But now he began to be care-

ful, and dreadfully troubled if the littlest spot or stain come on those white clothes. I can't tell you how singular he looked to us at first, though we got used to it after a time. He was so white himself, his skin, his hair and eyebrows and lashes, and when he had on those white clothes and stood, as he did so much of the time, straight and stiff, with his poor, lean arms stretched out, why it gave you a queer feeling to see him. But somehow, even at first, nobody laughed at him or made fun. Maybe as I tell it, seems 's if they would, as if he must have looked kind of laughable. That's because I don't tell it right. I can't give you any idea of how he appeared, particular of the look that was always on his face when he made that motion. I can't put it into words. I never could. Charlotte called it a smile the first time it ever came,

you know, but I didn't call it that then and I don't now. 'Twas just a brightening up of his eyes and face that had always been so dead before, and a sort of loving, pleasant, friendly look, and above all it was so in earnest, as if his whole heart and soul were in it, as if it meant, to him anyway, something so particular, so important, his standing there with his arms stretched out. Aunt Phrony Jesseman, a dear, good old woman that you don't remember—she died before you ever came to Franconia—she used to say that the boy looked to her as if he was carrying something very careful, something he set a good deal by; said he looked as if he was proud and pleased to do it, but most afraid. Anyway nobody did laugh at him, not even the boys, and Franconia boys are just as full of mischief as any other boys.

I see now that I ought to go back a little. I've known this story myself, you see, from the very beginning and I keep forgetting it's all new to you. I ought to have said before that from the very minute the boy first reached out his arms and had that new, live look on his face he was all changed and different; you might almost say he was another boy, not the same one at all. It was more like being born over again than anything else I ever saw. Of course we didn't see it all at once, but a little at a time, as things brought it out, but it was there from the very first minute. The other boy, the old one we had known for more than eleven year, had always been a trouble and a trial to every living soul around him. This new boy was a comfort and blessing to all of us. He began to use his limbs for other things besides making that motion; for

helping, kind, useful things. Seemed as if he could see before you hardly knew it yourself if you wanted some little thing done. And he'd do it, so quiet, and easy, not fussy to call attention to it, nor looking to be thanked; he'd only just do it. And always, always, every single time, either just before or just after he'd helped you he'd stretch out his arms and look at you with that—well, what his mother called a smile. Maybe 'twas that first put into his mother's head that the shape of that sign on the mountain had some real meaning to him. You see, it was quite a spell before we understood anything of the real, inside meaning to the change in the boy. Even his mother, who knew him best of all, though, as I said, she was the first to see, when he put his arms out that way that he was trying to make the cross on the moun-

tain, she didn't understand the rest. That the particular shape of what he'd seen had any wonderful meaning any more than if it was a circle or a square or a catty-cornered thing, why she didn't take that in at all, first-off. 'Twas only when we all saw the difference in him, the new, altered boy he'd been born into, as you might say, that some of us, Charlotte first, begun to think what that shape on the mountain stood for and what it meant, or at any rate ought to mean, to all of us. But how could it mean anything to that boy? I've told you what he was, just a half blind, dumb, stupid boy. He'd never seemed to take an idea of any kind into his poor, silly head. He had never been in a church or heard a sermon, never had read a word of Scripture, or a pious book, learnt a hymn or an answer out of the catechism,

never had, fact is, made use of any of what we call stated means of grace. So it isn't any wonder that it was a long spell before we could believe there was any spiritual meaning in the boy's copying with his stretched out arms that white sign or figure on the side of Lafayette. Fact is there was only a few of us at first that thought he really meant to copy it or meant anything at all by that queer moving of his arms. He kept doing it now, as I said, over and over through the day, and night times, too, for his mother said she often found him lying that way in his sleep. She was the first to think there was an inside meaning; but it wasn't very long before most everybody somehow took up that idea. You'd have done it yourself if you had been here then and seen him day after day. It was only that one shape or figure that in-

terested him, and he looked for that and found it, too, in lots and lots of things. You wouldn't think there was so many articles in the world shaped like that.

He'd come in some spring day, his hands full of those little flowers that make the pastures all whitey-blue, eyebrights you call them. That lady that boarded at Miss Peabody's said they were quaker-ladies and Dr. Dudley gives them the name of innocents; I had an aunt from Connecticut that always called them venus's-prides. But whatever their name is, there are always plenty of them here in May and June, and the boy would always pick them. He seemed to set so much by them and he'd always stretch his arms out, when he saw them. So we began to see that, look at it close, every one of those little flowers made a kind of cross, and he knew it. There are

four little parts, you know, to the posy part, and, hold it one way, they make an up and down piece and two arms, like a little whitey-blue cross. There were lots of posies that way, besides; mustard and water-cress and even that common little pepper grass; why, you'd see, after he'd made you take notice, that they were all just lots and lots of little bits of crosses, and he loved them all. Seems to me he loved everything and everybody now.

The queerest thing was the creatures, the horses and dogs and cats and sheep finding out the change so quick. I told you he never had liked them or treated them well and they'd always kept a safe distance from him. But we saw pretty soon now that they'd found how different he was and set everything by him. They were always round him, rubbing their heads against

him, whinnying or barking or purring or lowing or baaing when he came nigh, and he'd stroke or pat or smooth them and even bring them victuals or drink, always, every single time, making that singular motion of stretching out his arms. So all the creatures about the farm and at the neighbors', too, got to know that sign and feel it meant something good and comfortable for themselves. It wasn't only the creatures that loved him and watched for him; every man, woman and child in Franconia, Sugar Hill, Bethlehem and the whole district round got to being fond of that boy. You couldn't help it. He was the gentlest, kindest, helpfulest boy you ever saw, loving to his own folks and neighbors, pleasant to everybody, always ready to help people, comfort them in trouble in his still way, for he never learnt

to speak, good to all animals,—oh, I can't tell you what he was in those days and up to the end.

I told you there was a good deal of talk about it all; there couldn't help being. The people all round there saw him and wondered about him and what it all meant. The summer boarders when they came watched him and talked about it, and people came from miles away to see White Christopher. Oh, I forgot I hadn't told you about his having a name. You know I said his folks hadn't ever given him a first name. The summer after he waked up and first saw the snow cross, there was a minister came to Simon Gould's to board. He was dreadfully interested in the boy and when he found he hadn't any name he said he ought to be called Christopher. I don't think Cyrus and Charlotte under-

stood just at first what the word meant and why it seemed appropriate but they thought it was a nice sounding name and they gave it to the boy. So on account of his looks and the clothes he wore he got to being called by everybody round, White Christopher. That was the way he got his Christian name. A spell afterwards Professor Morse that taught in the Academy at Littleton told me what the name meant in some foreign language and I thought it was just beautiful and such a good name for the boy.

As I said, there've been people, a good many, I guess, that have thought Christopher didn't have any real meaning to what he did, that he didn't know what a cross was, nor what it stood for, and that it only just happened, his putting out his arms that way, a kind of accident, you

know. Well, maybe it was that way, I can't prove the other thing, though I believe it just as much as I believe the Bible. But, supposing they were right and it didn't mean anything to the boy, why, at any rate, it meant something to other folks, as anybody could see plain enough. I can't begin to tell you of the times that White Christopher set things right, smoothed away worries, settled quarrels, "turned away wrath," as Scripture says, with that one thing, almost the only thing he knew how to do. It was his way of preaching, even if he never knew what his sermons meant. I never knew a discourse ever so full of heads and fourthlies and fifthlies and stuffed with doctrines and decrees go home so to folks' hearts as that one still, small sermon of the boy's.

You might think everybody would get so

used to it after a spell that it wouldn't have much effect. It's singular to me that it didn't work that way, but it didn't. I never got used to it myself. I never came upon that boy, standing with his arms out, let it be in the bright daytime with the sun a shining on his white figure till it most seemed as if it was giving out light itself, or again in the dark of the evening when it showed white and soft like a cloud, or a bit of mist amongst the trees or against the black hill side, or most of all at sundown when that purply light we have here in the mountains came and touched everything, the white boy amongst the rest, making him almost red for a spell instead of white, I never, I tell you, came upon him without a queer, solemn feeling and a remembering, a coming home to me of many, many things I'd have been in dan-

ger of forgetting without him. I know 'twas so with other folks, too. Some of them told me so and other times I'd see the effect myself.

Why, even when the boys were quarrelling over their plays, their faces red and mad, their voices loud and harsh, fists doubled up ready to hit or holding a stone to fling at another, White Christopher would know it somehow, he always appeared to find out when such doings were going on, and first thing you knew he'd be standing there, white and straight, with his two white arms stretched out and over and betwixt them that white face with the loving, earnest, wishful look on it, and the boys, they mightn't give up right away; maybe they'd keep on a minute or so longer in the way boys do, you know, afraid of appearing to give in too easy. But they couldn't stand

it long; first one and then another'd drop out and steal off, and they'd all scatter before you knew it, ashamed and sorry, all the fight gone out of them. Folks said he put an end to a dog fight the same way once. Suppose he did, why not? I read in a book only the other day about a saint, I forget his name, that used to preach sermons to the beasts, and another that discoursed to the fish, so why shouldn't White Christopher preach his one little, still sermon to the dogs he liked so much and was always so good to? When there was trouble among neighbors, angry words, hard names and threatenings, where nobody else could interfere or say a word without making matters worse, Christopher would steal in like a thin, white, little ghost, so quiet and softly, stretch out his arms and stand, looking at them. Nothing

but that, just standing and looking at them. And it worked a change, almost always and a quick one too. And in town-meeting arguments, pretty hot ones sometimes, with high feeling on two sides or more, it was the same way.

And in the church—but I must go back again a little. Maybe you'd think that now the boy was so changed and bettered he'd be brought into the church, or at any rate would attend meeting Sundays. It does appear so, but it didn't work that way. Seems as if only one idea of religion had been put into his poor head. That was his whole religious life and he couldn't take in anything that didn't bear upon that. Charlotte and Cyrus tried taking him to meeting. It was in the days of the old union meeting-house and Mr. Foster was the Congregational minister. He was a good

man and he took a great interest in Christopher and wanted him to come to meeting. But when the boy got there one Sunday with his folks he appeared disappointed, not satisfied, somehow. I don't know what he had expected, what kind of idea he'd got into his head of where his mother was bringing him and what he'd see. But anyway he looked all around at the white walls and the pulpit and gallery and pews; seemed as if he was looking for something. Then he stretched out his arms, gave his mother one of those friendly looks of his, and turned and went away. It appeared as if there was only one kind of religion, one part of the whole gospel idea he could understand or take in and that was the part he called to folks' notice when he stretched out his arms and looked at them. He never went to meeting again, not, I mean, to a

regular Sunday service. There were two or three times he was just inside the door when he thought he was needed, but I'll tell you about that by-and-by.

His mother used to show him the pictures in the big Bible, just as she did before the change came. She'd go over the whole of them from Adam and Eve in the garden down to the beasts and the dragons in Revelations, turning the leaves, patient and pleasant, pointing out everything and explaining all about them. Christopher always kept still now and never jerked away or pushed her off, but you could see he wasn't taking any notice or understanding a word. The flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, David killing Goliath, Queen Esther and poor, afflicted Job didn't appear to interest him a bit, and when she came to the New Testament, the baby in the manger, the healing

the sick, raising up the dead, not even that beautiful picture of the Good Shepherd with the lamb in his arms, not one of them did he take a mite of notice of. Only just one single picture interested him and he waited, still and dull looking, all through the Bible till his mother came to that. It wasn't one of the best pictures, not by any means, it was dark and blurry and hard to make out. But he knew it, Christopher did, the very minute Charlotte turned to that page. It was a picture of that last awful, awful time when the cross stood there stiff and straight, its two arms stretched out and Him upon it. The cross itself hardly showed, the picture was so black and blotty, but the boy always found it, and right away, too. He'd stoop down, putting his half blind, blinking eyes close to the page to see it better, and then he'd straighten up

and hold out his arms and look with that loving, half sorry, half pleased look, that wasn't like any other look I ever saw.

As I said before, he'd find that shape wherever it was. There was a tall, spruce tree, a dead one, on Garnet Hill. It had been dead a good while and most of its branches were gone. But a little ways from the top there was one left on each side, standing out, straight and stiff. He saw it one day when he was riding with Cyrus and right off he made his own favorite motion with his two arms. He often went out to see it after that, and when you'd had your attention called to it once it did look just exactly like a tall, black cross, standing out against the light colored sky, all alone up there on a hill.

He liked all creatures, as I told you, but there were some he set more by than others.

There was a sorrel horse that belonged to Moses Watson, out on the Landaff road. It had a white mark on its forehead, such as most folks call a star. But it was a cross plain enough to White Christopher and he always called it so—in his own way of course. When he met it in the road he'd stop right in front of it and make his motion till I believe that horse knew all about it and what mark there was on his own forehead.

I was saying, a little ways back, that even if anybody held the idea that White Christopher didn't mean anything particular by the sign or shape he made, we could all see what it meant to other folks; I meant even to scoffers and unbelievers. That seemed singular to me. It wasn't so strange that members of the church, converted souls, saved by the cross themselves, should have

recognized its form when the boy made it, and remembered all it meant. But it wasn't them alone that felt it all and became quiet and serious and changed, if only for a minute, when they saw this white, straight figure with the arms stretched out. There was Lysander Emmons, an infidel, and proud of being one, always telling round what he believed—or didn't believe, I mean—and trying to shake other folks' faith in the best and most comforting things. When Lysander first heard talk about Christopher and his doings he made a great deal of fun of it all. I wouldn't like to tell right out the things he said about the boy and the shape he made with his arms, and all that shape stood for. 'Twas dreadful talk and I'd rather forget it. But after a spell he stopped talking that way. I never knew just how it came about, nor

heard how Lysander himself first saw the boy make that one motion of his, and how it struck him. But for quite a spell he would go a long piece out of his way to get rid of meeting the boy. It seemed to make him uncomfortable to see Christopher at all, particularly in that favorite position of his. However, after a time he appeared to change about that and to begin to like the boy as everybody else did, and he ended up by getting real fond of him. At first he kept on, at the store and such places, talking the old, profane, unbelieving talk, but always stopping short the minute he saw White Christopher come along. After a spell he stopped talking that way anywheres even when the boy wasn't around. He had been brought up by a good, believing mother, one of the best women in Waterford, across the river

from Littleton, you know, in Vermont. She'd been dead a long time then, but I suppose her teachings came back to the man when he saw Christopher mark out that shape she had told him the story about years before. But he never owned up. One time when somebody passed him in the road, just after he had met the boy, and saw him sort of brushing his eyes as if he couldn't see plain, he explained that it wasn't that "ridiculous thing" the boy was doing that stirred him up, only something it reminded him of. Well, I guess it reminded us all of something, fact is. But he couldn't keep from folks that he'd got fond of the boy; everybody could see that he set worlds by him.

One day Lysander was marking his sheep. You know you have to put a mark of some kind on them to tell them from

other people's sheep. Folks have different marks and it happened that Lysander's was a kind of a cross mark or a letter X, one straight line crossing another. He was putting it on with red paint, and just as he was holding a sheep and laying on this mark, White Christopher and his mother came along. The minute the boy saw what was going on he looked dreadfully pleased. That sort of loving smile, if you might call it so, lighted up his face as he looked at Lysander and then he stretched out his arms. His mother saw what he meant and was a mite afraid the man would not like it, proud as he'd always been of being an infidel, so she drew the boy away with her along the road. But when she'd gone a few steps she heard Lysander call her and turning round she saw him beckoning. She went back, and

he whispers to her so as not to let the boy hear, looking sort of foolish and ashamed all the time, "There's no occasion," he says, stammering, "to tell the boy what I'm actually doing; he thinks—well, you know what idea he's got about this—and mebbe you'd better let him go on thinking so, if it pleases him."

Well, after that, White Christopher set everything by those sheep. He appeared to feel as if they belonged to him and he must look out for them, see they had food and drink and were all safe and sheltered at night. If any of those sheep of Lysander's, with that mark on them in red, strayed away or got into any kind of trouble the boy seemed to find it out somehow and came to their help. And many lost or troubled sheep of other kinds were found out and helped by

White Christopher. As I look back to that time I wonder more and more that this whole district isn't different from other districts anywheres. For years we all lived right under the shadow of the cross, you might say. Night and day it was there, helping and comforting and warning. There wasn't a man, woman or child in the village or for miles around that could forget, even if they tried to, that blessed shape and what it stood for.

Elder Welcome was at Sugar Hill village then. You have heard of him. He was one of the old sort of strict, narrow, severe ministers, always preaching the law and in danger of forgetting the gospel. He was sometimes real harsh in his manners, but he had a kind heart inside, though many never found it out. The Elder was dreadfully down on what he called popery and

he gave that name to lots of things I never should. He wouldn't have anything to do with some of the very best and most comforting things, or what appears to me so, if they were things followed and made much of by what he called papists. And it wasn't only one denomination he gave that name to.

When he first heard talk of Christopher and his doings he was dreadfully worked up. He said he knew what folks meant by what they were saying though he didn't believe the poor, foolish boy meant any such thing. He said it was one of the most dangerous things in the world, and 'twas called making the sign of the cross. That don't sound so dangerous, does it? But I was brought up myself to think it was and maybe it's so. Anyway that wasn't exactly what White Christopher did. I've seen

the real thing, seen Catholics and Episcopals, too, the highest sort, you know, do it, and it isn't just precisely like Christopher's sign, though I guess it sometimes does what the boy's motion did, makes you think of things it's good to call to mind. So the Elder talked and even preached against this thing, and other mere outward forms, as he said, copyings of the dangerous and idolatrous practices of certain mistaken sects, and so on. For a spell he didn't see the boy following this dangerous practice himself, and I never knew how he came to at last.

Cyrus and Charlotte didn't belong to his church, but they'd known the Elder all their days and looked up to him. Fact is he sort of ruled over all that section of country and had the whole say as to religion and churches and all that. 'Twas a

good deal the way popes do, I suppose, even if the Elder was so down on them and their followers. So he came over to Franconia and dealt with the boy's father and mother about Christopher. Maybe it was then he first saw the boy make that solemn motion. I know he talked to him and tried to make him understand how dangerous it was to go on doing that, and why 'twas wicked to introduce such mere forms and idolatrous doings into communities. But it didn't appear to make much impression and the boy went on stretching out his poor, weak arms, day and night, to tired, troubled, sinful folks, and being a sign and a sermon, a help and a comfort and a loving reminding to all of us.

You see 'twas different, as far as I know, from what anybody else in the world ever did before. Folks have preached the cross,

and borne the cross, some people have died for the cross, and a few, dreadful few, have been put to death on the cross, copying as well as could be, in a poor, weak, human way, what their Master did. But this boy became the cross itself and there it stood before us day after day, night after night, till we knew it by heart, its shape, its looks, its sad and dreadful, but somehow beautiful meaning, every single soul of us in this Franconia valley. To be sure we'd had a sign of the same thing with us years and years, by spells. Way up on the side of old Lafayette would come out once in a while, sudden and bright and plain a great white cross. Sometimes all this valley would be in fog and the dark and wet, for days and days in May when the spring had ought to been with us, and just as we were getting

discouraged and low in our minds there'd come up a breeze and the mist and clouds would roll away from the mountains like a curtain lifting, and there would be the great, white, shining sign, way up on Lafayette. But it hadn't meant much to us somehow. I guess it was too far up, too strange and high and dazzling. We needed something low down, closer to us, everyday like, just to make clear, to explain in easy words, as you might say, that high, wonderful sign up in the clouds.

There was a good deal of feeling those days between the different denominations. I suppose there is now and always will be in this world. There was going to be some kind of a missionary meeting in Franconia one time, with people from all round this section attending, and a minister from Nashua to make an address and so on.

'Twas a great time for us and a meeting was called a spell beforehand to arrange about it. The three ministers in this village were there besides the Littleton and Lisbon and Bethlehem and Whitefield ones. It was in the old union meeting-house and most everybody round here went. I don't just recollect how it came about nor what started it but the meeting hadn't more than begun before there was trouble. The Baptist minister from Lisbon proposed something or other and the Congregational from Whitefield went against it. And then first thing we knew they were all taking sides and the point was, not whether this or that way of running the missionary meeting was best, but whether this or that sect was right in their doctrines. At it they went, hot and fierce, loud and angry, and growing worse and

worse every minute. Sprinkling or dipping, free will or election, perseverance or falling from grace, all were brought up and argued for and against till you couldn't hear yourself whisper. And it was called a *union* meeting too.

Elder Welcome was in the thick of it from the start. I can see him now as I think it all over, a tall, big framed man with a thick head of bushy, gray hair, looking most white 'twas so near his red face. And there he stood a swinging his long arms and bringing down one big fist on the palm of the other hand and bellowing out what he believed and what he said others didn't believe. Just in the middle of one of his loudest, harshest sayings I somehow heard —or felt, more like, for I don't see how I could have heard it in all that noise—a little kind of rustling, moving sound. And

I see the old Elder stop speaking and stand just as quiet without moving, his long arms still raised up in that threatening way of his as if he was going to knock down anybody that didn't hold his views.

He was looking down the aisle towards the door and I saw his face kind of change as if it was shaking a little and the red went out of it. I thought for a minute he'd got some kind of attack or stroke. Then I see other folks move round and look towards the door too and I turned my head like the rest. And there right inside the doorway was a little slim white figure with two arms held straight out and a white face betwixt them with a loving, though just a mite anxious, look, that wasn't exactly a smile, on its features, and I knew White Christopher had come. Everybody saw him and the house seemed dreadful still,

after all the noise and racket of that religious discussion. I don't think there was a soul there that didn't take in a blessed meaning to the sign that time, anyway. They couldn't help seeing the difference betwixt the two ends of that aisle in the meeting-house just then. Up pulpit way the angry, excited, argufying Christian ministers lifting their arms to threaten and put down their fellow Christians that didn't think their own way. And again, down at the door that little quiet figure, holding out his slim, weak arms in the shape of that one great thing that Christians everywhere can agree in remembering with love and everlasting thanksgiving. 'Twasn't but a few seconds, I suppose, but it appeared a long time before the Elder dropped his hands and sat down without another word and Dr. Lovell from Whitefield offered prayer.

I was going to tell you about two or three more occasions in that same old union meeting-house when Christopher came in just the nick of time, as you might say, when good folks had forgot themselves for the minute and there was a storm and noise. In his still way, without a single word out of his dumb lips, he seemed to say, most as his Master did that time when the waves of the sea ran high, "Peace, be still." and I tell you, as Scripture says, there was a great calm.

But I won't go into the particulars, for this story I'm telling is too long a'ready. There isn't any singular ending to it as perhaps you'd think there might be. Seems as if, if we humans had arranged things, we should have made the lesson of that poor boy's life those years stronger by having it end up in some remarkable

way that nobody could forget nor help paying attention to. If he had lost his life, to save somebody, if he'd been able to speak just before the end if 'twas only one word, just to show what he'd really meant by his one sign and signal, why that would have appeared so appropriate and fitting somehow. But it wasn't so. He was never very strong, you know, and he just kind of weakened and weakened, grew whiter and thinner and faded away like a flower when its time has come.

There was one thing about his dying that I've never talked about with Franconia folks. But it won't do any harm to speak of it to you after all these years. Mr. Foster, the minister here that had taken so much interest in Christopher, was away when the boy lay so sick. And when Cyrus and Charlotte saw the end

was near they sent for Elder Welcome. He was there at the very last and I was there too; nobody else but the boy's father and mother. Christopher had laid still and quiet for quite a spell with his eyes shut up and we thought he was most gone. He hadn't made his sign now for some hours; he was too weak to raise his arms. And there we waited, watching him and listening close for the last little breath. Cyrus and Charlotte were right side of him, and I was in the corner back of the head of the bed where I could see the boy and the rest but not trouble anybody by being around. Elder Welcome stood at the foot of the bed looking at the dying boy. He'd been real fond of him, like all of us, and I'd never seen his face look so kind and yearning and sorry before. I couldn't help looking at it instead of watching the little,

white face on the pillow that I knew so well. And all of a sudden I saw the old man's look change and he gave a start. I turned to look at the boy and I saw his eyes were wide open, and they were looking straight at the Elder, and, deary me, how loud those eyes spoke. The boy wanted something, and with all his might and main he was trying to ask for it. There was nothing else about him that showed any life, only those begging, praying eyes. I did think for a second that I saw his arms just tremble a mite as if he was trying hard to move them but I aint sure. But dear me, he didn't need to move them nor to speak, even if his poor dumb lips could have done it. We knew what he wanted; what other thing had he ever showed he wanted in all that shut up little life of his? And it

was Elder Welcome he was begging for it. I don't know how many seconds it was, it couldn't have been many, for Charlotte or Cyrus or me or all of us, I'm pretty sure, would have been ahead of the Elder and tried to satisfy the boy. But there was time for such a look of trouble, of doubting, of love and wanting to help, such a half scared look to pass over the Elder's hard featured, powerful, old face. Then he looked up, right up to the ceiling—through it, I guess—and I saw his lips moving. Bless the man, I'm certain sure he was asking beforehand to be forgiven for what he was going to do. Then—he streched out his two arms. He did it sort of quick and hurried, pretty awkward, looking round, half ashamed or frightened like, to see if we noticed, but he did it. And the boy saw it. He knew what it was, awkward

and only half finished as it was, and the old look that wasn't quite a smile, though his mother always held that it was, came over his face. And it stayed there till we shut it away two days afterwards and left him, asleep and waiting.

Yes, that's his grave that you were asking about, in the Streeter Neighborhood burying-ground, with the verse Mr. Foster picked out to put on the stone,

As When a Standard Bearer Fainteth.

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